

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Faith Fest, Harford County

24th Sunday Ordinary Time

Faith Fest, Harford County

Sept. 16, 2018

I know that Faith-Fest has been in the planning for quite some time and I was happy to serve on one of the committees – the “weather committee”! And while we are very happy that the weather has cooperated with this wonderful day-long gathering, I know we all remember those to the south of us who experienced the full destructive force of Hurricane Florence. Let us remember them in our prayers this evening, especially those who died or were injured or lost homes and other property.

Francik told me that you’ve all had so much fun today and that you’d probably be very tired by the time I began my homily. His advice was that I should limit my remarks to about forty-five minutes. But just in case the fireworks would start before I finish speaking, I’ll try to be brief.

Faith - Fest

So what is a “faith – fest”? I know it involves a lot of great food, music, games, fireworks – and a day of fun for you, our families and for our wider family of faith – the Catholic Church here in Harford County . . . represented by all our parishes. So let me ask you, did you have a good time?

But I understand that’s only part of what you did. Under the big tent there were booths and displays featuring all the many wonderful ministries and activities of the great parishes here in Harford County. I think about youth ministry, Catholic education, vocations discernment, marriage preparation and enrichment, men’s and women’s prayer groups, and a whole lot more . . . and to our priests, deacons, and the laity who sustain all this and more – well, let’s show them our heartfelt gratitude!

And there’s still more! This afternoon, you not only had fun and learned more about

what your parishes offer – you also took time to pray. You had a special place set aside for Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, the opportunity to receive the Sacrament of Penance, and many other prayer opportunities both traditional and contemporary. And I am told that almost everyone took advantage of these opportunities both as individuals and as families. Now *that's* the way to keep holy the Lord's Day!

A Celebration of Faith

So when we talk about “faith – fest” we are saying that our Catholic faith is a wonderful thing, that it is good, it is beautiful, and it is something that is well-worth getting together to celebrate, culminating with this Mass in which we are participating, this Mass in which we celebrate and encounter the one in whom we believe, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And when something is worth celebrating, it is worth sharing. By coming here to the Equestrian Center, in a big, public area, you are making a statement about your faith. You are saying that it's more than something you privately cherish – although we do cherish within our hearts the gift of faith. But you are saying something more than that – in effect you're saying that the faith needs to be shared publicly, with everyone, with those who no longer practice the faith, with those who don't believe, with those who are alienated from the Church, with those who are searching.

And you may say to me, “Archbishop, have you noticed that it's a really difficult time to share our faith with others?” No doubt about it – we're in crisis mode and when I examine my conscience, I know that, for all we've tried to do, there is a lot more to be done – especially in making sure that myself and all bishops are held accountable for our conduct and for responding transparently to any and all misconduct that could harm the young, the innocent, and the vulnerable. And while there is a lot of hard work underway to address this very issue and to get to the bottom of some very troubling questions, I am aware, as you are aware, that this crisis will not pass quickly, that it will be with us for quite some time to come. So, yes, I can't help but notice that it's a difficult time to celebrate the faith, and to the degree that my fellow bishops and I have made it more difficult for you, I sincerely apologize.

Joyful, Courageous Perseverance

What, then, should we do, fold up our tent, walk away, and go home? If we pay close attention to today's Gospel, I think we'll do just the opposite. You remember the scene: Jesus polls his closest followers. "What are they saying of me? Who do they say I am?" Then, as now, there were a lot of opinions but they were all wrong. Popular opinion did not understand who the humble rabbi from Nazareth really was. They knew he was really important but they didn't come close to guessing who he was.

Jesus challenged his closest followers: "Well, what about you? Who do you say I am?" Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Peter answered, "The Messiah of God." Against popular opinion and beyond the thinking of his fellow Apostles, Peter proclaimed that Jesus is the Son of God, the Anointed, the Savior of the World – just as we are called to proclaim the Name of Jesus no matter what popular opinion may think of Jesus or Christianity or the Church, just as we are called to proclaim the Name of Jesus even when our closest friends and colleagues decide it isn't worth it to be a believer and to practice the faith on anything like a regular basis.

But there's more! Peter, who magnificently proclaims Jesus' true identity, stumbles and falls in very short order. When Jesus tells the apostles that he must die to save the world, Peter objects. A man of suffering wasn't the kind of Messiah that Peter was looking for, and if he had anything to say about Peter would not let a cruel fate befall his Master. So, Jesus rebukes Peter for getting in the way of the work his Father gave him to do and tells him to "get behind him" – even calling Peter Satan – that must have stung! But what is Jesus telling us by this sharp exchange with Peter? That we must not try to reinvent Jesus to suit our personal tastes and opinions, that we must not get out ahead of Jesus and try to lead him where we want to go. Rather, our place is behind Jesus as his followers and as his disciples.

And if we decide to spend our lives following Jesus, where will he lead us? Jesus gives us the answer in today's Gospel: Unless we are willing to pick up our Cross and follow him, we cannot be his disciples. Jesus inevitably leads us to Calvary – certainly at every Mass in which we re-encounter his saving death for our salvation – but also in the events of daily life and in the present time of crisis in the Church. Even if you had nothing to do with creating the present crisis, you are carrying a heavy cross just like the Lord who bore on his shoulders the sin of the world. If, as

your bishop, I can help you bear your cross just as Symon of Cyrene helped Jesus bear his cross, please know that I am humbled and honored to do so. Please also know that when we follow the Lord all the way to Calvary, he inevitably leads us not to unending death but to unending life, to a resurgence of the grace that we need to follow him with perseverance, courage, and joy.

So, far from being the wrong time to celebrate our faith this is precisely the right time to celebrate our faith – to make every day of our lives a faith-fest until that day dawns when, as Bl. John Henry Newman said, we are led out of shadows and symbols into the full light of truth! May God bless us and keep us always in his love!